

Albert Bleau: A Life of Service

Introduction

Al Bleau was voted to the Board of Directors of Greater Lynn Mental Health Association in 1971, and was voted its Executive Director on April 8, 1974.

GLMH had recently closed its Child Guidance Clinic, transferring its staff and contracts to the Comprehensive Mental Health Center at Union Hospital. Its annual budget at this time was \$30,000. Al Bleau was the only full time employee. He had a 16 hour a week secretary, and they ran a summer camp for 40 emotionally disturbed children. Their only asset was a home on Baltimore St. that was mortgaged at 50% of its value.

His assignment by the board was to change GLMH into an advocacy agency to promote community involvement and community organization on behalf of Greater Lynn's mentally retarded and emotionally disturbed citizens. This was a major part of Mr. Bleau's efforts during the first five years of his Directorship.

Today the Association is one of the largest Human Services Providers in Massachusetts with an annual operating budget of over \$30,000,000 serving over 3,000 individuals in two counties and over 30 cities and towns. During his 25 years as its CEO, the IRS has audited GLMHRA three times, by the State Auditors office on two occasions. The last state audit four years ago involved five auditors over a nine-month period. Twice independent auditors hired by the Executive Office of Human Services and once by the Mass Rate Setting Commission have also audited them. Additionally, the Federal Government HCFA has audited them. All audits came up with minimal or no findings and no state or federal funds misspent or misallocate.

Additionally, the Association had been recognized in Mass. and nationally as a human services leader and innovator. Association programs have consistently achieved outstanding praise from colleagues and state agencies. They have achieved three consecutive certifications from CARF with distinction in which services and the leadership were rated as exemplary. Similar results were received from recent DMR Quest certifications and DMH Quality Assurance and Licensing Surveys.

Beginning with his two years in Peace Corps Brazil, and on the Lynn School Committee, and for 25 years as the CEO of GLMH, Al Bleau has consistently fought for the rights of the mentally retarded and the mentally ill to be accepted and supported into the mainstream of the community. Few have contributed more during this time.

The Following is a chronology of some of his most outstanding achievements:

PEACE CORPS

Was placed in a federally designated Model Agricultural Community. Responsible to develop agricultural businesses with youth and school lunch programs.

Assigned as a Peace Corps Trainer for new volunteers during last year in Brazil.

HEAD START DIRECTOR- PARENT SERVICES COORDINATOR-Lynn (1970-74)

Opened the first integrated preschool classroom with severely retarded and emotionally disturbed children.

Applied for and received private and public funding to open an after school and summer program for 75 disadvantaged youth.

Applied and received an Office of Child Development research grant to train and consult with other Head Start and early childhood centers to integrate special needs children into their pre school programs.

Developed five early childhood courses to be offered to Head Start mothers. Received accreditation from NSCC and offered courses in the basement of the Head Start Offices for three years. NSCC received a federal grant based on my program and became the two-year early childhood program. By the time I left Head Start, four of the six classrooms had former parents as Head Teachers. All had taken my courses.

With three other directors organized the first national Head Start Director's Conference. As a member of the National Steering Committee, formed the National Head Start Director's Association

GLMHRA

As a member of the Lynn School Committee, presented a plan to Administration and the Committee which they adopted making Lynn the first city in Mass. to fully adopt Chapter 766.

Organized 766 Parent Advisory Councils in Lynn, Swampscott, Saugus, and Lynnfield. Three of those Councils are still active and strong today.

Organized three Greater Lynn Conferences, bringing special needs parents, educators and administrators together to learn and communicate.

Despite opposition from the entire City Council, Mayor, and the Lynn Item and various neighbors opened the first Psychiatric Halfway House on Baltimore St. in Lynn in 1974. This was only the second in Mass.

Received federal NIMH grants and developed client directed demonstration model for job training for mentally ill adults at the Lynn Friendship Club.

Received additional NIMH funding and developed the first cooperative housing program for mentally ill adults in Mass. in 1979.

Opened one of the first coop apt. and staffed apt programs for MR adults in 1975.

Opened ICF MR facilities beginning in 1982 serving some of the most clinically and medically involved consumers ever deinstitutionalized by DMR. Linda Bleau and I moved into one ICF in order to provide 24 hr supervision and oversight. We alternated mornings in the Tewksbury and Saugus ICF MR's as well.

Filed a class action suit against DMR and DPH to prevent my brother, and five Association MR adults and over 30 adults statewide from being reinstitutionalized. They had not exited buildings in two and one half minutes independently. As a result of this suit the state adopted the federal section 21 building code.

With GLMHRA formed the Special Needs Housing Corporation in 1978 that has assured that the wealth from our efforts would remain in the non profit community and not with private landlords. Became a model for other agencies.

Filed HUD complaint against FaniMae concerning definition of owner occupied in a housing development resulting in over 20 million dollars being set up nationwide for financing for housing for mentally ill and retarded citizens.

Involved with precedent setting State Supreme Court ruling in Winchester allowing the conversion of a carriage house for mentally retarded citizens. Atty. Vitali represented GLMHRA in this case. The State Attorney General filed and Amicus Brief on our behalf.

Filed HUD complaints resulting in the way the Salem Historical Society and the Wenham Conservation Commission approve renovation requests for the handicapped.

Have taken over and renovated seven drug -infested rooming houses and apartment buildings in Lynn. Housing was converted to affordable housing units primarily for our consumers. Substantial risk and threats from drug dealers on one instance resulted in the State Police providing him with protection.

Developed vacation opportunities for staff and consumers in Florida and NH. Purchased one home in Florida and subsidized consumer and staff vacations for over eight years to the tune of over \$25,000. Linda Bleau and he also personally guaranteed the Housing Corporation's home in order to obtain a mortgage. At one point he personally guaranteed over six properties owned by The Housing

Corporation and leased to GLMHRA, including Saugus Geriatrics, the Lewis St. and Wardwell Ave. apts., Shepard St., and others. He also personally guaranteed the handicapped van at Houston Ave.

Developed and built the first non profit four story office building, 37 Friend St. He and Linda put their family home up as collateral for the construction loan. When Haymarket Bank refused to commit an additional million dollars as promised they came close to losing their home. Fortunately, Mr. Bleau was able to secure alternate financing.

Has been a leader in receiving bank financing and tax exempt loan financing in the non profit community. GLMHRA and EMHC were one of the first corporations to receive stand-alone tax exempt financing.